

October 7, 2004

District Health Revises Influenza Vaccination Plans in Light of National Shortage

After half of the nation's anticipated influenza vaccine supply was pulled from distribution earlier this week due to manufacturing problems at vaccine-maker Chiron's plant in England, South Central District Health has carefully surveyed its own supply and supplies available in the community and determined that all future influenza clinics offered by the agency will vaccinate only people who meet "high-risk" criteria set out by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Those at most risk for complications from influenza are young children, the elderly, and those with chronic medical conditions, such as congestive heart failure, asthma, or diabetes.

"We will continue giving influenza vaccine by appointment until we run out, but we will only be giving the vaccine to people who are at high risk of complications if they get the flu," said Tom Machala, Communicable Disease Prevention Director for South Central District Health. "We are asking the general population to help us out this year and not get an influenza shot so that those who may experience serious complications from the flu can get one."

Machala said that South Central District Health ordered 6,000 doses from another vaccine manufacturer, Aventis Pasteur. The District received about 1,500 doses in an initial shipment, has given approximately 1,000 doses during influenza vaccination clinics held before the announcement was made about the Chiron vaccine, and expects to receive the remaining vaccine it ordered. However, the CDC has announced that available vaccine stock may have to be redistributed to areas of the country that ordered some or all of their vaccine from Chiron.

Machala said that there may be private entities in the community that have influenza vaccine available and District Health is counting on them to screen people seeking a shot and only vaccinate those individuals who meet the CDC's high-risk criteria.

Individuals at high-risk of complications from influenza include:

- All children aged 6-23 months,
- Adults aged 65 years or over,
- Persons aged 2-64 years with underlying chronic medical conditions,
- All women who will be pregnant during influenza season,
- Residents of nursing homes and long-term care facilities,
- Children 6 months to 18 years of age on chronic aspirin therapy,
- Health-care workers with direct patient care, and
- Out-of-home caregivers and household contacts of children less than 6 months of age.

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District Health reminds people that it is especially important to follow preventive measures to protect themselves from getting influenza or spreading it to others. Preventive measures include:

- Use proper hand washing techniques, especially before eating or after being out in the public;
- Stay home from work or school if you are sick;
- Cover your mouth if you are sniffing, sneezing or coughing;
- Do not share eating utensils, drinking glasses, towels, or other personal items;
- Refrain from visiting nursing homes or anyplace where someone with a chronic illness resides if you have flu-like symptoms;
- Avoid people who may be sneezing or coughing. After visiting public places, avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth until you have washed your hands; and
- Get plenty of rest, exercise, and eat healthy.

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